**Main Idea** : the southern colonial economies were based on agriculture and their products were very important in colonial trade.

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| **Southern Colonial Economies**  Products from the southern colonies were very important in colonial trade. Still, the region remained rural, with economies based on agriculture. Unlike the northern colonies, only a few cities formed in the South.       The southern colonies produced valuable [**cash crops**](javascript:top.hrwSpawnGlossaryTerm('cash%20crops');)—agricultural products grown to be sold. One was tobacco, America’s most valuable export. Indigo, a plant used to make a blue dye, and rice were also grown in the South. Southerners also produced naval stores—products such as rope, tar, and turpentine that were used to **[maintain](javascript:code.getNodeByID('id_8').doEvent('onClick');)** wooden ships. There was great demand in England for these crops—and great profit to be made from them.  **The plantation system** As tobacco became an increasingly important crop, a way of life known as the plantation system developed in Virginia and Maryland. A plantation is a large farm, usually in a warm climate, with an unskilled labor force that grows one cash crop, such as sugar or tobacco. The plantation system soon became widespread through much of the South. Eventually, a wealthy and influential class of planters emerged. These planters dominated southern society and politics.       Plantations needed workers, and this need encouraged the growth of slavery. A few huge plantations had hundreds of workers, either indentured servants or slaves. Most farms were smaller and had a work force of fewer than 30. The bulk of these workers labored in the fields, although men and women on large plantations performed other necessary tasks such as shoemaking, weaving, and carpentry.    **Rice and indigo** While tobacco was king in Virginia, rice and indigo were the dominant crops in South Carolina. The low-lying coastline and marshes of South Carolina proved ideal for growing rice. Some historians think that enslaved West Africans brought the knowledge of rice growing to America. |

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| **South Carolina Rice Plantation, 1730–1750**  On early rice plantations like this one, nearly all tasks were done by hand. Enslaved Africans performed the arduous work of planting, harvesting, and cultivating the rice. |

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| History Close-Up: South Carolina Rice Plantation, 1730-1750 |

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| **Tasks on a Rice Plantation** |

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| **1.** | **Planting** Slaves planted rice by hand in the spring. |
| **2.** | **Watering** Rice is grown in flooded fields, so rice plantations were built near natural water sources. |
| **3.** | **Canal Building** Plantation owners had slaves construct canals to direct the water to the fields. Canals and floodgates controlled the flow of water to the rice fields. |
| **4.** | **Harvesting** Slaves harvested rice in the fall. |
| **5.** | **Pounding** Getting the rice ready to sell was hard work. First, slaves pounded the rice. |
| **6.** | **Winnowing** Then they brought it to the winnowing house, where they dropped it through a grating in the floor. The rice grains fell to the ground below and were collected. Later, rice mills did this task. |
| **7.** | **Shipping** The river also provided a way to transport rice to buyers. |

Growing rice in swampy fields was difficult and dangerous. Mosquitoes bred in the wet coastal conditions, and they could carry malaria, a deadly disease. Free workers would not tolerate these conditions. Rice planters turned instead to enslaved Africans to do the work. Many enslaved Africans already knew successful methods of rice growing. In addition, many of them had more resistance to malaria.

     The other major crop in South Carolina was indigo, a plant from the West Indies whose seeds were used to produce a deep blue dye. Indigo was widely used for military uniforms and men’s coats.

     The first successful indigo crop was grown in South Carolina by [**Eliza Lucas**](javascript:code.getNodeByID('id_8').doEvent('onClick');). In 1739 at about age 17, she was left to manage her father’s plantations while he returned to military duty in the West Indies. Lucas experimented with crops such as ginger, figs, and indigo. She wrote about her experiences in 1740.

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**HISTORY’S VOICES**

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| “Wrote my Father a very long letter on his plantation affairs and … on the pains I had taken to bring the Indigo, Ginger, Cotton … and had greater hopes from the Indigo (if I could have the seed earlier next year from the West Indies) than any of the rest of the things I had tryd.” |
| —*Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*, 1740 |
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     The new crop soon became profitable. Demand in England was so great that Parliament offered a bonus to indigo growers. By 1754 South Carolina exported a million pounds annually.

     In 1744 Eliza Lucas married a widowed planter, Charles Pinckney. Their two sons became well-known politicians and soldiers. One was a signer of the Constitution.

**Small farms** Southern economies rested on the plantation system and its valuable crops. Most farmers did not live on plantations, however, but on small farms. Even small farmers sometimes had a few enslaved Africans who worked in the fields alongside them.

     These independent [**yeoman**](javascript:top.hrwSpawnGlossaryTerm('yeoman');) (YOH-muhn) farmers raised livestock and exported beef and pork. They grew corn, wheat, fruit, and vegetables for the home market. Small-scale farmers also grew tobacco but had to sell it through the large planters.

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**The Impact of Slavery**

English and Spanish settlers needed workers for their plantations and haciendas. Some colonists tried to enslave Native Americans. Due to disease and other problems, such efforts often failed. In the 1600s, indentured servants from England and Europe supplied most labor in the colonies. But former indentured servants began to pose problems in the colonies. Eventually, colonists came to depend on the work of enslaved Africans instead.

**The African slave trade** By the 1600s Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, and England were involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Most captured Africans were taken to colonies in the Caribbean and South America, then to North America.